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10-5-2018

Assessing College Students' Foundational Skills: Communication and Critical Thinking

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Recommended Citation

Sweetland, Yuerong and Klingler, Michael, "Assessing College Students' Foundational Skills: Communication and Critical Thinking" (2018). *Scholars Showcase 2018: Innovations in Leadership and Learning*. 79.

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Assessing College Students’ Foundational Skills – Communication and Critical Thinking

Yuerong Sweetland, Michael Klingler
Franklin University
2018



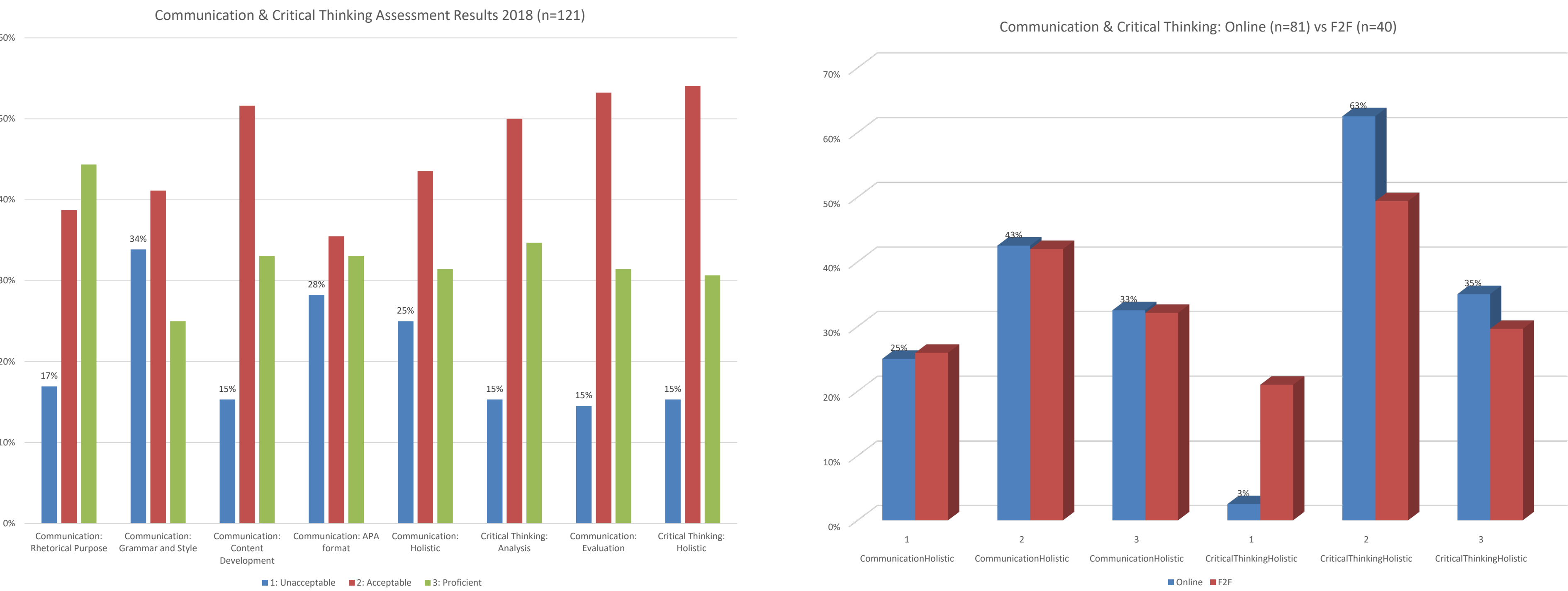
Abstract

- Communication and critical thinking are foundational skills for college students, which have been strongly emphasized by employers, along with other skills (Hart Research Associates, 2015)
- Foundational skills are often reflected in general education outcomes, which are not only taught in General Education courses but also reinforced and assessed in major area courses.
- Assessment of communication and critical thinking skills are conducted in both major area courses and general education courses. This poster presents findings on student performances through work products created in senior level major area courses. Performances are also compared between F2F and online sections.

Assessment Methods

- Assessment artifacts: Randomly selected student assignments from 4 undergraduate capstone courses:
 - Business Administration
 - Public Relations
 - Healthcare Management
 - Accounting
- F2F and Online sections were both selected. Overall sample sizes for F2F sections were smaller, because some courses were only offered online.
- Assessment taskforce consisted of faculty members in the disciplines, in general education, and in assessment.

Assessment Findings



Evaluation Rubric

	1: Unacceptable	2: Acceptable	3: Proficient
Rhetorical Purpose: Demonstrates an understanding of rhetorical context (audience, subject, and genre) and how it affects communication.	The student’s work does not demonstrate a basic understanding of how particular rhetorical contexts (audiences, subjects, and genres) affect communication choices.	The student’s work demonstrates a sufficient understanding of how particular rhetorical contexts (audiences, subjects, and genres) affect communication choices.	The student’s work demonstrates an effective understanding of how particular rhetorical contexts (audiences, subjects, and genres) affect communication choices.
Grammar and Style: Uses grammar, mechanics, and verbal style appropriate to the rhetorical purpose.	The composition’s grammar, mechanics, or verbal style is inappropriate for achieving its rhetorical purpose.	The composition’s grammar, mechanics, and verbal style are generally appropriate for achieving its rhetorical purpose.	The composition’s grammar, mechanics, and verbal style substantially contribute to its ability to achieve its rhetorical purpose.
Content Development: Develops and arranges verbal and visual content in a manner appropriate to the rhetorical purpose.	The composition’s development or arrangement of verbal and visual content is inappropriate for achieving its rhetorical purpose.	The composition’s development and arrangement of verbal and visual content are generally appropriate for achieving its rhetorical purpose.	The composition’s development and arrangement of verbal and visual content substantially contribute to its ability to achieve its rhetorical purpose.
Format: Uses APA format.	Does not cite any references or consistently uses APA format incorrectly.	Uses APA format, with only minor violations.	Provides accurate and complete citations according to APA format.
Analysis: Analyzes the specific components of the argument - the conclusion (i.e., a claim, thesis, position, problem, or solution) and the premises (i.e., reasons) that support the conclusion.	Does not effectively analyze the argument.	For the most part, effectively analyzes the argument.	Effectively analyzes the argument.
Evaluation: Evaluates each argument for the truth and strength of its premises and the validity of its logical form.	Does not effectively evaluate each argument.	For the most part, effectively evaluates each argument.	Effectively evaluates each argument.

Findings Summary

- Critical thinking: 85% of the papers were rated as meeting the outcome; online sections seemed to have outperformed the F2F sections in all aspects of critical thinking (analysis and evaluation).
- Communication: Three quarters of the papers were rated as meeting the outcome; differences between online and F2F sections were overall not statistically significant, except in the criterion of content development.
- The differences between F2F and online in performances are likely due to differences in student populations: online sections tend to attract students who are better prepared academically on average, in comparison with F2F sections. Future research is needed in this area.

References

- Hart Research Associates (2015). *Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

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